

Inspection of a good school: Tow Law Millennium Primary School

Wear Street, Attlee Estate, Tow Law, Bishop Auckland, County Durham DL13 4LF

Inspection date: 14 February 2023

Outcome

Tow Law Millennium Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where staff and pupils have mutual respect. Leaders have created an environment that blends the taught curriculum with wider opportunities effectively. Pupils enjoy observing and caring for animals that are housed onsite, including ducks, chickens and fish. They learn about the environment and how these animals thrive. The secret garden has its own bird-watching area. This allows pupils to study birds in their own environment.

Leaders have high expectations for all pupils in all aspects of school life. Respect and understanding permeate how pupils play, learn and grow together. Pupils are keen for everyone to be happy and have a friend. Well-being champions are there to help and support their classmates. Behaviour that is mean or unkind is rare. Pupils know what bullying is and to report it immediately. While it is rare, pupils are clear that staff are quick to act and stop it when it happens.

Clubs such as dance, computing and the early years games club help pupils to develop talents, wider interests and social skills. Pupils are proud to take on leadership positions such as school council members and library leaders.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have a relentless focus on helping pupils to read. Regular, well-structured training has ensured all staff are able to support pupils no matter what stage of reading they are at. Phonics begins in the first week of the early years. Reading happens every day in all classes. Staff carefully check on pupils' progress in reading. Leaders use this information to provide well-considered support to those pupils who need extra help.

Leaders have identified that some children need support with speech and language development. Strategies in place are improving pupils' ability to communicate. In nursery, staff focus on high-quality interactions with children through poems, songs and rhymes. As a result, children communicate well when they move into Reception.

A curriculum that dedicates time to all areas of the national curriculum is in place. There is enough time to teach the subject content and for pupils to learn the important knowledge they need. Subjects such as reading and mathematics are thoughtfully designed and taught well. In other subjects, a lack of clarity from leaders in relation to specific content is creating some confusion and adding to the workload of staff. For example, in geography, examples used in class when learning about coastal areas vary and do not always provide opportunities to teach the intended curriculum in depth. However, leaders are conducting further curriculum refinement to address this.

Staff are enthusiastic and enjoy teaching. They appreciate the well-planned professional development opportunities that leaders provide, particularly in reading. In lessons, activities that engage pupils are productive and worthwhile. However, some staff feel overburdened with planning different activities for different pupils. This is due to the lack of precision in aspects of curriculum thinking. Assessment is taking place but is not always effective. In some subjects, assessment is not clearly linked to what has been taught. It does not show what pupils know or the gaps in pupils' knowledge. This limits the ability of staff to adjust their teaching and plans to meet the needs of pupils. However, in reading, staff use assessment well to inform actions and offer support to pupils.

Pupils are polite, curious and well behaved. They support each other and take the time to check on how others are feeling. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to engage with the community. Local community figures from the fire brigade and police force regularly visit classes. They support the teaching of the personal, social and health education curriculum.

Pupils learn about diverse cultures and beliefs. Leaders have established links with a school in northern France. This allows pupils to explore the similarities and differences they have with pupils from a different country.

Leaders coordinate dedicated support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They ensure equality of opportunity in the various aspects of school life. Access to the curriculum is a right for all that leaders have made non-negotiable. Leaders work with families and external agencies to get advice and help for pupils with additional needs. Leaders then share information with staff, which they then apply well in their teaching.

In the early years, staff are caring and attentive. Children play and explore indoor and outdoor areas. Staff encourage children to hold their attention on activities. As a result, children can hold concentration for extended periods of time. Daily reading and mathematical activities that have well-understood routines are built on in other activities by staff throughout the day.

Those responsible for governance have an informed view of the community and the school. The staff have a profound sense of togetherness. Staff morale is high.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff have regular high-quality safeguarding training. The training focuses on national and local issues. The positive relationships that leaders have with the police and local community help to ensure the training is specific to the risks pupils face in the local community. Pupils and staff are well informed of the potential risks they face when not in school.

Pupils feel safe. They trust adults to follow up on any concerns or worries they share.

Governors check safeguarding processes, including the safer recruitment of staff, carefully.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, curriculum thinking does not provide clear and appropriate examples which can be used to teach the desired content. This means that at times staff use weak examples and tasks that do not develop knowledge. Leaders should continue with the refinement of the subject curriculums, ensuring there is clarity and support for teachers in relation to tasks and activities that are chosen to embed the identified important subject knowledge in all areas.
- Assessment is not used consistently well. Leaders have not been specific regarding the purpose and use of assessment. As a result, in some subjects, teachers' understanding of what pupils know and the gaps they have in learning are limited. Leaders need to develop the effectiveness of assessment so that teachers can make informed decisions about each child and the most appropriate learning activities required to meet pupils' needs in the different subject areas.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2013.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	114055
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10241879
Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	93
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Lisa Croft
Headteacher	Lisa Jackson
Website	www.towlaw.org.uk/schools
Date of previous inspection	3 October 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller-than-average-size primary school.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the effect of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors conducted deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, and geography. In these subjects, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with the acting headteacher, other school leaders, staff and governors, including the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from Durham local authority.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the lead inspector checked the single central record of recruitment checks and talked to leaders responsible for safeguarding.
- The inspectors also considered the views of pupils, parents and staff through discussions, as well as through responses to Ofsted's online surveys.

Inspection team

Richard Jones, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jo Heaton

Ofsted Inspector

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